

9

Juanita S. Dilley

Pocahontas County

June 11, 1940

Chapter 5 Section 1-a

TIME DEVOTED TO RELIGION

* The belief of the older people was that, "prayer and peotinde hindered no man," and so time was always found for prayer, as well as for breakfast and supper. The reading of the Bible, and a season of meditation and prayer before breakfast was a habit very characteristic of the Scotch-Irish and was something which was never omitted in so many of the pioneer homes.

Alexander Waddell of Scotch-Irish descent and one of the earliest settlers in the neighborhood of Marvin Chapel was a fervently pious person. It was his intense desire to live one hundred years, and he made his desire for longevity a matter of special prayer. He died at the age of one hundred and two years, thus receiving a full measure and more. The history of his life shows he paid good attention to Bible reading where it is written in the thirty-fourth Psalm: "What man is he that desireth life and loveth many days that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile; depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it." This Psalm was a great favorite with our pious pioneer people to give them consolation in their time of trouble and distress.

Joseph Hannah was a person of impressive personal appearance. His memory was remarkably retentive, and his conversational powers something wonderful. He had committed

to memory, it is believed by some, the greater portion of the Bible for he could recite the Scriptures for hours at a time, having special reference for the historical narratives of the patriarchs and the wanderings of the Israelites and the Promised Land under Joshua. He saw in these historical narratives illustrations of the life now to be lived by Christian people. It was one of the greatest pleasures of his old age to repeat these narratives in the presence of his neighbors. Mr. Price says, "The last time I ever saw Mr. Hannah, we were spending the night at Sampson Ocheltree's in the winter of 1849. The two old men were in busy conversation until a late hour, and most of the talk was about the children of Israel and the dealings of God. The fire was getting low, the candle was about burned out, when Mother Ocheltree observed it was about time to get ready for bed. At this suggestion Mr. Hannah arose and in a very soft, solemn tone repeated and then sang a hymn. He then knelt in prayer and poured out his full heart in humble, trusting prayer, in the tone and manner of a loving child to a kind and more loving father."

(Mr. Hannah lived on Elk and is the same Joseph Hannah who leaped the gully, a distance of 42 feet referred to in a previous report)

Mr. and Mrs. John Sharp, the pioneers, were pious, industrious people. Mrs. Sharp was quiet in all her ways, very diligent in her duties, and patiently met and endured the toils and inconveniences of living in the woods. Some of the first religious meetings ever held in the vicinity of Frost were at their home.

David Gibson of Elk was very industrious and handed down to his children habits of thrift that brought them prosperity. His home was always open to the stranger that might come along. His confidences were sometimes abused and imposition practiced upon him, but that made no difference with his treatment of others. For years his home was at the service of the preachers and thus most of the preaching on Upper Elk was at his house. Marys Chapel was named for his wife Mary Sharp Gibson.

It was a great undertaking to locate in the unbroken forest and build up a home and rear the family these worthy family people succeeded so well in doing. All such should be remembered and their services gratefully appreciated, and the story of their lives told for the instruction and encouragement of the generations following. The righteous, the honest and industrious should be held in lasting remembrance.

Daniel Kerr of the upper part of the county was a sincerely pious person, and the close of his life was very touching. He had assembled his family for domestic worship. Upon finishing the Scripture lesson he knelt for family prayer, and for a long interval he was silent. Upon going to him in that position he was found to be speechless and helpless. Much of the time after this he appeared to take very little notice of what was going on, and seemed unable to recognize friends. One day there was a gleam of intelligence and he uttered these words: "Farewell to all," and then lapsed into silence and not long thereafter died so gently he had been dead some minutes before the fact was realized.

John Webb is a character about whom it may be said, he was without father or mother as far as any biographical purpose can be served. His Irish brogue, his habit of saying not foolish things and never doing anything very wisely, tended to corroborate what he always averred---that he was of Irish nativity. He had the papers showing that he was an honorably discharged soldier of the Revolution, and as a pensioner received \$96. a year. How he ever came to Pocahontas is not known, but it is supposed that he came because of some persons from the county who served in the war when he did. Though he exposed his life for independence he never owned land and never married. Yet he wanted a home of his own, therefore received permission of William Moore, son of "Pennsylvania" John Moore, to use without rent as much land as he might want for a cabin, garden and truck patch. He built up a cozy cabin and opened up two or three acres where he produced corn, vegetables and poultry. On this he subsisted, with the assistance of his pension and such wages as he could earn in harvesting for the farmers on Knapp's Creek.

In the later years of his life John Webb was very piously inclined and was demonstrative of his religious emotions. He was long remembered as the life of many "good meetings" at old Mount Zion, Frost and elsewhere. He would frequently have "the jerks" which was such a feature in the revival services so common at that time. As long as he lived he would always have a spasmodic jerk as he repeated the "amen," even when asking a blessing on his meals. This phenomenon that characterized the religious services of most of the denominations of a hundred years ago has been considered by mental

experts as one of the curiosities of the emotional faculty of the human race. Some of the people such as the American Indian have never so much as heard there is a Holy Ghost.

John Webb remained in his bachelor home until he was disabled by the infirmities of advance age. Then it was that Martin Dilley took charge of the old veteran. He built a log cabin in the yard near his own home, and cared for him until the old soldier passed on. He was buried in the Dilley Cemetery.

William Edmiston and Samuel Davies Poage were congenial friends and attached Christian brethren though of different persuasions and rather strenuous in their respective doctrinal views. This indicated that their hearts were imbued with a pious fervor that got the better of their mere intellectual notions. They agreed to disagree, and not mar their Christian fellowship with vain wrangling about their respective creeds. Mr. Edmiston's piety was of the highly emotional, demonstrative type and for years his emotions seemed to be the first to kindle and burn with the holy fervor that makes religious services so interesting to many people. His Christian character was above reproach, and all regarded him as sincere. He was looked upon as a master Christian, and had it not been for the somewhat counteracting influence exerted by Nathaniel Kinnison, a silent calm Israelite indeed in whom there was no guile, the impression might have been that no one could expect to be a model Christian without this zeal and demonstrative fervor. Such might have been the impression, but when the characters of Nathaniel Kinnison and Davies Poage were considered, the impression prevailed that there were different ways

in which people could be warm hearted, genuine christians, and so there was mutual respect and genuine Christian fellowship. For many years Mr. Edmiston was a pillar in the M.E. Church, and the secret of his influence was his lovely christian deportment. Kinnison was also a pillar in the M.E. Church, but his piety was that developed in calm retreat, the silent shade, that seemed to him, by God's bounty, made for those who worship God--so suitable for personal prayer and praise to the unseen though ever present one.

A predominant trait in the character of Isaiah Curry was his common sense view of profane language. His remote ancestors were among the people that suffered for their religious views in the north of Ireland, and came to America seeking a place to worship unmolested by civil and religious tyranny. To start with, in his home training his father and mother had him to notice that in the Ten Commandments cursing and swearing were forbidden along with murder, licentiousness, and theft. He could not bear the idea of being classed with the murder, the immoral and the dishonest in the sight of Him who has the power over life and death, and who is to dispense the final rewards and penalties. Hence his speech was pure, and he deplored profanity in others.

About the year 1827, Robert Beale settled on Elk. A bed of tansy near the roadside marks the place where his house stood. The house was built of hewn timbers and floored with plank sawn with the whip saw by hand, and was considered an excellent building for that time. He was very energetic and

industrious, and while he owned slaves, he worked with his own hands as laboriously as the humblest. It was believed that he contracted his fatal illness at a log rolling. His wife was Mary Vance Poage, daughter of Major William Poage of Marlins Bottom. The Sabbath days were mostly spent in prayer meetings and Sunday school services with the families of David Gibson, David Hannah and Joseph Hannah their near neighbors, and for the most part held in his own home. Ministers of the gospel made his home a place of preaching. Dr. John McElhenny, Revs. Kerr and William G. Campbell, pioneers of the Presbyterians in his region, officiated at his residence and pleasant, profitable meetings were the result. He was sincerely and intelligently pious. His ideal of a home such as he desired was to have ample pastures with flocks of sheep and herds of cattle and horses, and to live removed from the extravagance and allurements of society life, have books and papers, and to be on pleasant terms with kind and honest neighbors. His death occurred in 1833. On an eminence overlooking his home, where he frequently passed Sunday evenings, in summer, with his wife and little daughter Margaret Elizabeth (mother of Robert, James and George H. Moffett) his grave was made.

John Jordan, a tailor by trade, settled on Millstone Run between Hillsboro and Locust. He was one of the ~~principal~~ ^{principal} ruling elders of the Oak Grove Church. His home was open to Methodists and Presbyterians ministers without any apparent discrimination, and for years was one of the main preaching places for Methodist ministers. He donated the site of the Methodist church near his residence. This church was destroyed

by fire before the Civil War. In its time, this was the most comfortable building of the kind in the county in possession of that sect. He was buried near the ruins of the Millstone Run Church, as it was called. His grave seems to have been nicely cared for. A neatly carved stone, the handiwork of the late John Bruffey, marks the place where a good man rests in hope. Mr. Jordan was a Presbyterian yet saw to the building of a church for the other sect.

Mr. Price writes: Samuel Davies Poage had been educated for the Presbyterian ministry, but declined the exercises of its duties through a morbid sense of unworthiness, unfitness for assuming duties so sacred and responsible as he regarded Ministerial vows demanded. He was a faithful helper in the prayer meetings led by his brother George Poage. While attending school taught by Rev. Joseph Brown at the Brick Church, I boarded in Mr. Poage's family. I have heard him in secret prayer in his private room long after midnight, such were his devotional habits. It mattered not how cold the night might be, he would spend hours in that room in secret devotions, and oftentimes he would come out with his features all radiant with ecstatic emotion.

William Poage Sr. (father of Samuel D. Poage) was a Presbyterian ruling elder, and virtually the founder of the Oak Grove Church. Some of the first meetings conducted by Presbyterian ministers in this region were at his house. When the pulpit would be vacant years at a time there would be religious meetings at his home or the homes of his sons, who were also ruling elders. Visiting friends from Kentucky

brought with them the revival spirit that had rendered the early history of Ky. so famous, and it broke out in the Little Levels in 1801. Parties in Augusta heard of it, and came over to see and hear what it all meant. The pastor of the Old Stone Church Rev. William Wilson, and fifteen or twenty of the young people of his congregation, came over together. They became imbued with the spirit of the moment and went back singing and praying as they went along. The effect upon the people of the valley as the rode up was overwhelming, and from that point--The Old Stone Church----the revival influence went all over th the state. So it appears that a great matter was kindled by a little watch fire that had been kindled in the old Poage homestead in the Little Levels.

James Rogers was a zealous and devoted adherent of the Methodist Protestant Church. He was one of the first members in the Buckeye community and probably one of the first in the county. His prayers and experience talks, experience meetings were very popular in early times, were interspread with allusions to the parables and quotations of the promises. Morning worship in his home was never omitted. One of his expressions was an allusion to the grapes of Eschol as typical of the richness of the promised land. His idea was that God would give his humble peaying people here while on the pilgrimage a cluster now and then from the heavenly vine so as to refresh and encourage them to put forth their earnest, faithful efforts to go up and receive possession of the heavenly land.

While not a member of the church, William Moore's

10
walk and conversation exemplified all the visible traits of genuine Christian principle. In a religious meeting in the old Hamlin Chapel some years before his decease, he was invited by the class leader, John R. Duffield, to testify what he thought of the Christian religion. William Moore arose in that solemn and dignified manner of which he was rather remarkable, and stated that he had been a praying person for fifty years, and had conscientiously tried to live with a conscience void of offense toward God and man and, moreover, it was his hearts desire hereafter to live in all good conscience toward the same.

Mr. Price Writes: The first cottage prayer meeting I remember was at the home of Abram Duffield, who came here soon after the Revolution, Early one Sabbath in May, my parents with their four small children came to the Duffield home to attend the meeting that had been announced. No one had yet arrived when we reached the place. Upon entering the porch, voices were heard within as if persons were engaged in reading or praying. AS we listened it was found that it was the venerable Abram Duffield reading to his invalid wife the account given by Saint Mathew of our Redeem^{er's} temptation in the wilderness. There seems to have been mutial rejoicing over the Redeemer's victory, and if the benefits of this victory had been for these two old people alone, their satisfaction could not have been more real. When silence intervened, we knocked at the door and were told to come in. There were the two old people and no one else in the room. It was not long, however, before quite a number assembled, and the prayer meeting was quite a spirited one.

W.W. Sutton writes in the Pocahontas Times dated July 29, 1937: I was not yet nine years old when the Rev. Wm. T. Price a Presbyterian minister came to our home on Deer Creek above Green Bank, and while mother prepared the dinner, I was left in the living room to keep company for the minister. Soon Mr. Price placed his head backward against the wall, closed his eyes and began to sing,"

" Saviorr more than life to me

I am clinging, clinging close to Thee;

Let Thy precious blood applied,

Keep me ever near Thy side!"

He swelled a little on the chorus:

Every day, every hour, let me feel Thy cleansi
ng power.

May Thy tender love to me

Bind me closer, closer Lord to Thee".

There was melody in the preachers voice and it was sweetly penetrating.

OTHER HYMNS SONG BY THE PIONEERS

The Gospel Ship is Sailing By
Bear Me Away on Your Snowy Wings
I Will Arise and go to Jesus
When I Can Read My Title Clear
Jesus Lover of My Soul
Near My God to Thee
Abide With Me

To be deeply religious seems to have been one of the chief characteristics of the early Scotch-Irish who came to the county, and since the greater percent of the first settlers in the county were these Scotch-Irish, most of the people here were religious. Old timers tell me that they would ride as far as ten miles to church, and they never thought of missing a Sunday if it was at all possible to get to church.

oo I can remember when my parents thought it somewhat of a calamity to have to miss Sunday School and church. There were no cars in those days, but father would walk through the fields taking with him those of us old enough to walk the mile, and mother took the younger children and went horseback. Every one else in the community did the same. Now, 1940, they do not even have a Sunday School in this same community.

I, too, can remember when there was family prayer, but I have not been present at one for at least twenty years. Since I taught school for many years in different sections of the county and have had a chance to know something of the lives of the people, I think I am safe in saying that the morning and evening worship, once considered so important, ~~is~~ almost if not entirely ~~omitted~~ from the lives of the people today. Though most families still ask the blessing on their meals.

* From----History of Pocahontas--Wm. T. Price

Told to me by--Saul Stone of Boyer and Tom Bruffey of Lobealia

oo My own comment

Birth of these men were born about the time of the Civil War

West Virginia Writers' Project
RESEARCH IDENTIFICATION REPORT

Subject Pocahontas County History Date March 12, 1941
Research Worker Juanita S. Dilley Date Research Taken March 11, 1941
Typist Juanita S. Dilley Date Typed March 12, 1941
Source _____ Date Filed _____
From Mrs. Annette Coyner and Mrs. Louisa Coyner, life long
members of the church and daughters of John and Callie Wilson
who built the first church.



